EVERY YEAR 2 MILLION TOURISTS TRAVEL TO NORTHERN AFRICA TO A LIMESTONE PLATEAU a few miles west of Egypt's mighty Nile river. There they gaze in wonder at ancient ruins that have amazed people for almost 5000 years--the Pyramids of Giza.

The ruins at Giza have been a tourist destination since the time of the Roman empire. Interest in the pyramids and the culture of ancient Egypt reached new highs in Europe when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt with his army in 1789. Although his military objective failed, his second objective was a stunning success. He had also brought a small army of scholars, surveyors and artists with him to study the ruins of Egypt. The excitement their work produced in Europe inspired still more research and exploration. One of the discoveries of the Napoleonic expedition was the famed Rosetta stone that allowed the ancient picture writing of the Egyptians to be read for the first time in 1,500 years. (See the box on the bottom of page 98 for more Rosetta Stone information)

The ability to read what the ancient Egyptians had to say about themselves provided the most accurate view of ancient Egyptian society that anyone had seen for many centuries.

Today ancient Egyptian culture continues to fascinate us. Scholars studying the ruins still make worldwide headlines with every major discovery. Countless books, television documentaries, and even a number of blockbuster films have featured ancient Egypt. There is even a pyramid (symbolizing durability) printed on the back of every U.S. one dollar bill.

Why do People Seem So Fascinated By Pyramids?

The sheer size of the pyramids alone was enough to attract attention and inspire wonder. For much of its history the largest of...
Associated with each pyramid are pyramid complexes consisting of other smaller pyramids, temples, and mastabas. Mastabas are rectangular burial mounds that can be as high as 20 feet (6 m). Also known as the Pyramid of Cheops, it is the oldest and largest of the three pyramids in the Giza pyramid complex. It is the only one of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World to survive. The Great Pyramid was the tallest man-made structure in the world for over 3,800 years until the Lincoln Cathedral in England was completed in 1311 AD. Read about the mysteries of Pyramids Facts. The Step Pyramid, the third of the Giza Pyramids is considerably smaller than the first two. Built by Pharaoh Menkaure circa 2490 BC, it featured a much more complex mortuary temple. Each massive pyramid is but one part of a larger complex, including a palace, temples, solar boat pits, and other features. Building Boom. The ancient engineering feats at Giza were so impressive that even today scientists can't be sure how the pyramids were built. Yet they have learned much about the people who built them and the political power necessary to make it happen. The builders were skilled, well-fed Egyptian workers. The real mystery of the pyramid is how they built it. There are many theories but the absolute size and accomplishment of planning the interior spaces with huge stones and then capping the outside with smaller stones is indeed a mystery that has never been solved. This is not to say that aliens or any other outlandish claims built the pyramids it simply means that we don't know exactly how it was done. It was also done very early in the Egyptian time frame. The same situation occurs in Peru with stone so massive that it's almost impossible how humans could build it but it is there.